



# UBNow

February 15, 2022

UBNow • Working at UB • Obituaries • Gerald “Gerry” O’Grady

## News and views for the UB community

### Gerald “Gerry” O’Grady

Published June 5, 2019

A celebration of the life of Gerald “Gerry” O’Grady, a longtime UB faculty member and pioneering media scholar, will take place at 1 p.m. June 8 at the Burchfield Penney Art Center.

O’Grady died March 26 in Cambridge, Mass. He was 87.

O’Grady led the early 1970s media revolution in Buffalo, which was among the first cities in the nation to create a public access center for film and video equipment and education.

He founded the Center for Media Study — now the Department of Media Study — at UB, teaching both the theory and practice of film and video at a time when few universities in the world were doing so. He helped hire the legendary filmmakers Hollis Frampton, Tony Conrad and Paul Sharits, the documentary filmmaker James Blue, the video artists Steina and Woody Vasulka, and the media artist Peter Weibel, and the department soon became a hotbed of experimentation and innovation in the field.

O’Grady’s influence today “remains far-reaching and profound,” says Carine Mardorossian, chair of the Department of Media Study. “He advocated for a new way of using image and sound, a way of seeing and understanding media he referred to as ‘mediacy,’ i.e., the literacy of a new generation whose legacies are as important and inspiring now as they were then.

“It is under Gerry’s leadership that the vision of a scholarly and social engagement with media study and media art, of a hybrid theory and practice model, was realized,” Mardorossian says. “His goal was first and foremost to improve public media competence ‘for it is only possible to participate fully in society if one understands its channels and modes of communication.’”

Born in Framingham, Mass., O’Grady attended Boston College on a basketball scholarship, earning bachelor’s and master’s degrees in English. He went on to the University of Wisconsin, where he received a doctorate in English in 1958 and then did three years of postdoctoral study in medieval literature as a Marshall Scholar at Oxford University, working with C.S. Lewis, J.R.R. Tolkien and Beryl Smalley.

He joined the UB faculty in 1967 after teaching English at Rice University. Originally hired to teach medieval literature, his focus soon changed to visual communication — through film, video and computer images.

While at UB, O’Grady also founded and served as director of the Educational Communications Center, which served all of the media production and classroom needs of 128 departments at UB, and managed UB’s public radio station WBFO, as well as a studio providing engineering and business courses to industry on cable television, and a foreign language laboratory.

In addition, he created Media Study/Buffalo, an independently funded organization that offered members of the Buffalo community access to workshops, equipment and exhibition space downtown.

O’Grady retired from UB in 1994 and took a position at Harvard University, where he was a Ford Foundation fellow at the W.E.B. Du Bois Institute for Afro-American Research. After leaving Harvard in 1997, he served as a consultant to media programs at schools in the U.S. and abroad, and was a visiting professor in Germany.

#### ARTS EVENTS

Feb 15  
**BHM: Tough Topics: The Legacy of Slavery**  
2:00 PM – 3:00 PM  
Student Union – Room 240

Feb 15  
**Tasting Tuesday at One World Café**  
2:00 PM – 3:00 PM  
Norton Hall

Feb 15  
**BHM: Social Justice Movie Night: The 13th Documentary Screening**  
6:00 PM – 8:30 PM  
Student Union – Pride & Tradition Room 330

MORE ARTS EVENTS

#### SPORTING EVENTS

Feb 15  
**2/15 7:00 PM University at Buffalo Men's Basketball at Bowling Green**  
7:00 PM

Feb 16  
**2/16 6:30 PM University at Buffalo Women's Basketball at Ball State**  
6:30 PM

Feb 17  
**2/17 6:00 PM University at Buffalo Men's Basketball at Eastern Michigan**  
6:00 PM

MORE SPORTING EVENTS

#### ACADEMIC EVENTS

Feb 15  
**Institute for Artificial Intelligence and Data Science Seminar: TBA**  
3:00 PM – 4:00 PM

Feb 15  
**Dr. Yveline Alexis, Hati Fights Back: Charlemagne Péralte & the Cacos**  
3:30 PM – 5:00 PM

Feb 15  
**MAE Seminar - From Modal Analysis to Physical Exploration and Flow Control: Applications to Impinging Jet and Cavity Flows**  
3:30 PM – 4:30 PM  
Furnas Hall – Room 206

MORE ACADEMIC EVENTS